



U.S. COAST GUARD SUMMARY OF INVESTIGATING OFFICER ACTIVITY

Matter Investigated: Capsizing – (Barge) AMBITION
Vessel: (Barge) AMBITION (ON. CG1647791)
(ITV) KAREN KOBY (O.N. 1230122)

Interview Of: Charles “Chester” Murphy – Captain for KAREN KOBY, LA Carriers

Date/Time: 11 July 2022 (approximately) 13:30 – 15:52

Location: Jones Walker Office, 201 St. Charles Ave., New Orleans, LA 70170

Interviewed By: CWO [REDACTED], USCG; Adam Tucker, NTSB

Attendees: Alan Breaud – Breaud & Myers (representing Rigid Constructors interests), Jefferson Tillery – Jones Walker LLP (representing LA Carriers interests), Tommy Plaisance - LA Carriers Operations Manager (Party in Interest), John Plaisance – LA Carriers, Jeff Mizzi – Rigid Constructors President of Marine Operations (Party in Interest), Brian Capitelli – representing Captain Chester Murphy, Wayne Zeringue – Jones Walker LLP (note taking for LA Carriers)

This summary of interview is based on the information obtained during the interview of the above individual. Identity was verified via pictured ID. This interview was not recorded.

Mr. Murphy has been with LA Carriers for 2 and a half years as a captain and was part of the crew on the Inspected Towing Vessel (ITV) KAREN KOBY transporting the barge AMBITION when the incident occurred. He stated his training and qualifications included 1600 tons oceans master towing endorsement, STCW, and has had is merchant mariner’s credential for 25 years. LA Carriers provided the training for the company safety training and had monthly online training.

Mr. Murphy’s towing vessel experience was 35 years total in the field, 25 years licensed and 10 years as a crewmember on supply vessels. He had 25 years of experience with barges, with 5 or 6 crane barges each year. He explained there is no difference in the handling of crane barges versus flat barges but the visibility around crane barges is difficult.

For this voyage, it was the office’s determination to have Mr. Williams as a relief captain. Mr. Murphy has worked with him before. He also knew that Mr. Williams had training as a mate before becoming a relief captain. Mr. Murphy believed that Mr. Murphy had the experience to be a relief captain and be in charge of the vessel operations when he wasn’t on the bridge.

Mr. Murphy said on June 13, 2022, he was notified to pick up the AMBITION. He was underway for about 10 days into his hitch at that point. They left Larose to Lake Charles which was about 18-20 hours with a 6 on and 6 off rotation. That was working 6 hours, off 6 hours. His shift was from 6AM to noon and 6PM to midnight.

He was at the wheel when the KAREN KOBY first approached the AMBITION. He noticed that the freeboard on the barge was about 4 feet deeper on the bow than the stern. He called Rigid to tell them that they were arriving and going to tie up to the barge. He spoke with Ronnie about the job to go to Stone Fuel in Cameron then to the Mississippi River.



According to Mr. Murphy, when they arrived the spuds were down on the barge. They attached to the port bow then swung around to secure to the starboard bow later. (This is shown as #1 on his diagram). After the barge crew was done securing the items on the barge, the spuds were raised up. The barge crew was going to follow them in a skiff.

Mr. Murphy said that the green day beacon #89 (marker) grazed with the port bow on the barge. He was aware that the barge hit a marker on the way to Stone Fuel but it was not logged. He stated there was no reason to log it because they only “brushed” against the piling.

He was then notified of another approaching ship inbound from Cameron, so he had to regroup on the bow. He chose the bow because of the vessel listing 4 feet lower on the bow than the stern. Before moving from the hip (side of the barge) to the bow, Mr. Murphy said the barge wasn’t handling well and was “crabbing”, running sideways. When he moved to the bow and started pushing the barge, it corrected and handled great, “Like a dream.”

Mr. Murphy said the transit from Lake Charles to Stone Fuel Dock was usually 4 hours, but they added 20-30 minutes for this voyage for maneuvering. Jared Williams was maneuvering the vessel and took over at noon on that day to continue to Cameron. Mr. Murphy slept until around 16:00/16:30 and got up after they were already at the fuel dock.

There was a crew boat at the slip they were supposed to go to so they waited for the crew boat to move. Mr. Williams attempted to put the barge in the north slip but due to the current, was not able to. Mr. Murphy took over at the wheel and tried to go into the same slip. They notified the fuel dock and decided to go to the outside fuel station instead of north slip. There was no wind but the current was about 1.5 knots.

Mr. Murphy was informed that the fuel dock would be shut down at 17:00 so they were rushing and that they had to begin fueling by 16:30. The fueling was only for the barge and the tug did not take on any fuel. He noticed the crew for the barge has a “pep in their step” and a sense of urgency to get the barge prepped.

Mr. Murphy then reference on a map where Lake Charles is and the Fuel dock. Duval fleet is in Lake Charles, where the AMBITION was, around 235 on the intracoastal waterway (ICW).

While at the fuel dock, the Rigid crew filled the fuel tank and ballasted to put the stern down. The trim improved and the freeboard was now about 4’ on the bow and 5’ on the stern.

The deck crew for the KAREN KOBY did the barge inspection. They were checking for damages, manhole covers, etc.... They reported 2 missing covers, so he notified Ronnie to send them back to take care of it. A couple of barge crew came back and secured it.

When asked about the barge AMBITION: He did not walk the AMBITION and was never on the barge. He did not know how many manholes were on the barge or if anyone checked them for water.



He said Tony reported a pump was over one and angle iron was over another, and he didn't know if the covers were dogged down or just laying down.

Mr. Murphy also asked Ronnie if there were any sea condition restrictions and Ronnie said the barge was good to go and to have a good voyage. He confirmed with Ronnie that the barge was good to go.

Mr. Murphy then mentioned that LA Carriers takes responsibility of the barge when departing the dock and heading for the destination. Leaving the fuel dock is where he assumed the barge and being in charge of the barge in transit to Stone Fuel.

They did a voyage plan and navigation risk assessment before they left the fuel dock. When asked to explain a "Navigation Assessment", Mr. Murphy said it includes the winds, seas, routes, current, air clearances, predicted seas, lights, running lights, and checklists in TSMS.

Mr. Murphy said they left the fuel pier in a tow arrangement with 100' of two wire and then let out about 1,000' of tow after they passed the jetties. He also mentioned that there were no issues before entering the Gulf of Mexico and that he did not see anyone taking pictures during the transit.

Mr. Murphy made the decision of how much towline to let out and he did not recall that being an issue. The barge was pulled directly behind the vessel.

When the incident occurred, Mr. Murphy said the KAREN KOBY was 19 miles from shore and the barge was within 1000 feet of the vessel. This was the farthest from shore during this transit because they had to go around a shoal, the Trinity shoals. They were about 1 – 1 ½ nautical miles away from the shoals. It had a short hawser to control the barge, which was closer to the vessel for more control. The longer tow wires, of 1,000', act as a shock absorber to avoid breaking the bridles.

The tow consisted of a 65'x1" braided steel; Eye then thimble on the other end; 15' nylon shock line; a 65 ton shackle, and 1 ¾ tow line steel rope. There were 3 radars: 1 in the doghouse, and 2 in the wheelhouse. There was also a depth sounder which read 46' from the keel so they were in about 55' water depth.

He recalled the sea state to be 2-3 foot seas.

Mr. Murphy said he had never towed the AMBITION before and he did the trip from Lake Charles to the Gulf of Mexico at least 25-30 times. However, he never did this transit with a crane barge. This was the first e-crane he ever worked with. It had the same handling as other crane barges. The running lights on the barge were supplied by LA Carriers and installed when leaving Stone Fuel. They operated using a battery and solar panels.

Mr. Murphy also confirmed what he saw on the barge and stated their locations using the barge schematics. The locations are referenced in parenthesis (). He recalled seeing a Conex box (3), concrete blocks (4), a generator (5), manlift (6), and portable pumps scattered all over the barge. He does not recall seeing anything strapped down.



While underway, Mr. Murphy confirmed that the crew monitors the barge visually. There was no set times that it was checked but everybody checked it, including him. He checked it at least 2 to 3 times each watch. They used binoculars and a variable range marker (VRM) ring on radar. He was never made aware the barge was outside the VRM.

He took the 18:00 watch with the tow wire out and the barge was riding fine. There was no spray on the deck, and it got dark about 2-2 ½ hours later and that was their last visual.

Mr. Murphy was relieved at midnight and passed the basic general information. It was dark and the lights on the barge could be seen but they could not tell anything else. Nothing out of the ordinary. At 03:30 Jared woke him due to a problem with the barge. They used spotlights but could not see anything specific. They knew it capsized when the KAREN KOBY stopped. He asked how the vessel was handling before and Jared told him it was not handling any different, but they did lose ½ knot of speed.

They did not hear anything when the vessel capsized and did not know the speed of the KAREN KOBY at the time of the capsizing. He estimates it was about 4.5 knots when he was at the wheel. The tugs draft was about 10'. The spotlight they used was a mirror lens, not a focused beam so they could only see shadows of the barge. It appeared to be listing to the port side. There was a westerly current, maybe 0.5 knots.

Mr. Murphy commented that there was no timeframe or deadline for the transit, but he did feel rushed based on a “general ambience.”

He also commented that there was no other route to take and offshore was the only option.

Compared to his past voyages, there was nothing different on this transit before the barge capsized. He also said he had no idea what caused the incident and could think of nothing that would have prevented it.

Mr. Murphy was asked, if he had the same job to do tomorrow, is there anything different he would do? His reply was: Yes, he would have contacted the office about the manhole covers. He also confirmed that he knows he has authority to stop all operations if something seemed dangerous and he constantly adapts to situations when on the vessel.

End of Interview Summary.

Full name of person producing the summary:

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SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

14 July 2022
DATE